## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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## U.S. ARMY EUROPE POSTAL SYSTEM TACKLES HOLIDAY MAILING SURGE

## By Spc. Shane Eschenburg

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

**MANNHEIM, Germany --** With the holiday season here, many people have been kneedeep in packing, wrapping, stamping, tying, taping and mailing. And U.S. Army Europe postal workers in Heidelberg and Mannheim have been neck-deep in the results of all that activity as they keep the holiday post moving.

A mail recipient in the area normally sees only the final product of the postal system -- stopping by one of the nine community mail rooms and six unit mail rooms in the vicinity to see whether today's shipment bears bills or birthday greetings. Most are probably unaware of the many components that play a

role in a mailing process that they depend upon to move their letters, cards, and that all-time Christmas favorite -- presents -quickly and efficiently.



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Roy Cowley of the 566th Postal Company sorts letter mail at the Mannheim (Germany) Regional Post Office on Spinelli Barracks Nov. 29. During the holiday season the RPO has received about two truckloads of mail each day, six days a week.

Mail operations here center on the busy Mannheim Regional Post Office operated by USAREUR's 1st Personnel Command, the central location at Spinelli Barracks that processes literally tons of mail day in and day out.

"We receive more than one million pieces of mail a year," said RPO supervisor Robert L. Smith.

A typical delivery during the holidays brings about 1,000 pieces of mail to Mannheim, compared to the 600 – meager by comparison -- that arrive in each shipment the rest of the year, postal officials say.

The surge starts early in the holiday season.

"We've seen an increase in mail since...before Thanksgiving," said Sylvester Witherspoon, supervisor of the Stuttgart RPO.

John E. Little, Mannheim's postmaster, said his RPO has been getting two truckloads of mail a day since mid-November, twice the normal load.

To help move all that holiday post flow along, community mail rooms get extra help from volunteers and units.

Spc. Tony Venturato, a network systems signal operator and maintainer with the 72nd Signal Battalion, helped out at



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Spc. Chanel Fimon and Sgt. Tara Bottleman (right) of the U.S. Army Reserve's 387th Adjutant General Battalion from Fort Dodge, Iowa, prepare liners for mail carts in the Mannheim (Germany) Regional Post Office Nov. 29. Ten Soldiers from the 387th completed their two-week annual training by helping out the RPO during the holiday season mail surge.

Mannheim's Army Post Office for two months during the Christmas season and saw the holiday mailing surge first-hand.

"It's ... busier than last week, and it should get a lot busier in the weeks to come," said Venturato the last week of November.

The Mannheim RPO's Christmas gift was holiday help from an Army Reserve unit -- the 387th Adjutant General Battalion from Fort Dodge, Iowa -- whose Soldiers pitched in while completing their two-week mandatory annual training.

Master Sgt. Richard Aguilera of the 387th brought nine Soldiers to Mannheim from Iowa, and said helping out at the RPO felt good, and provided good training for his troops.

But even Aguilera, who has 32 years of postal service experience, said the volume of holiday mail that comes into Mannheim is overwhelming.

"We added Saturday to the work week during the holiday season," said Smith, who has been Mannheim RPO supervisor since 2002. "We receive one to two trailers on Saturdays and mail is available for pickup by licensed mail clerks."

For all that, Witherspoon implied that less mail is coming in this year than during holiday seasons past.

"People are doing a lot of online shopping because of the euro exchange rate," he said.

Pro or part-timer, everyone who handles the mail must attend a postal handling class and earn a mail handling license. And these days, with security a primary concern, mail protection measures are in place from start to finish.

"Any time we get a volunteer it is helpful -- and we wish there were more ...we let them decide what they want to do, but they have to go through mail security classes before handling the mail," said Little.

Little added, however, that volunteers are not allowed to participate in postal operations for which they are not trained, authorized or certified.

"Surge time" or "slow time," every card with \$5 from Grandma in Michigan to grandson in Livorno; every love letter from sweetheart in Seattle to Soldier in Schweinfurt; every package from every shopping catalog -- every single piece of mail sent from the U.S. to Army Soldiers, civilian employees and family members in Europe -- is collected in New York.



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John Little, Mannheim (Germany) community mail
room postmaster, secures a mail bag for shipment
Nov 29. Each waterproof bag can hold up to three to
five parcels.

From there it flies to the German Air Mail Terminal at Frankfurt International Airport. Germany's mail is loaded up there and trucked to one of six RPOs. Mail bound for other Europe locations such as England, Italy, The Netherlands and Belgium also lands at Frankfurt and is routed to its respective destinations.

Terminal, RPOs and mail rooms are constantly alive with the motions of loading, sorting, sacking and stacking that move the mail along to those who anxiously await it. As it travels its every move must conform to U.S. Postal Service, DoD and USAREUR regulations and guidelines.

From the first parcel that hits a conveyor belt in Frankfurt to the last letter tossed in a mailbox in Vicenza, the Army in Europe's big mail machine moves mountains at a relentless tempo, but Little says the system works quite well.

"We're here day after day putting out the mail, and it runs smooth," he says.

(Note: Susan Huseman of U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart contributed to this article.)



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